

A HISTORY OF LOUISVILLE

THERE was excitement aplenty that February in 1838 when this history of Louisville's last 125 years had its beginning. First off, the Louisville end of the Lexington and Ohio Railroad was nearing completion from Portland to Sixth Street, a distance of three miles, and the prospect was being greeted with something less than wild enthusiasm.

As a matter of fact, there was serious talk over many a toddy quaffed in the ornate bars at the Galt House and the Louisville Hotel of ripping up the rails and pushing the wagon-size locomotive into the river.

Irate citizens, especially merchants, still nervous from the financial panic that had swept across the nation the year before, were convinced that the loud-snorting, wood-burning locomotive would be a nuisance that not only would endanger life but also damage business at a time when it was beginning to come back strong.

On top of that, the city, then a curious mixture of brick, stone and log buildings, also was buzzing over the recent unsuccessful effort to rob the Louisville Savings Bank, and the slaying in Washington of Jonathan Cilley, a member of Congress from Maine, by Representative William J. Graves of Louisville.

Elsewhere in the city, the population of which then was estimated at 20,000, seven schools were in operation with

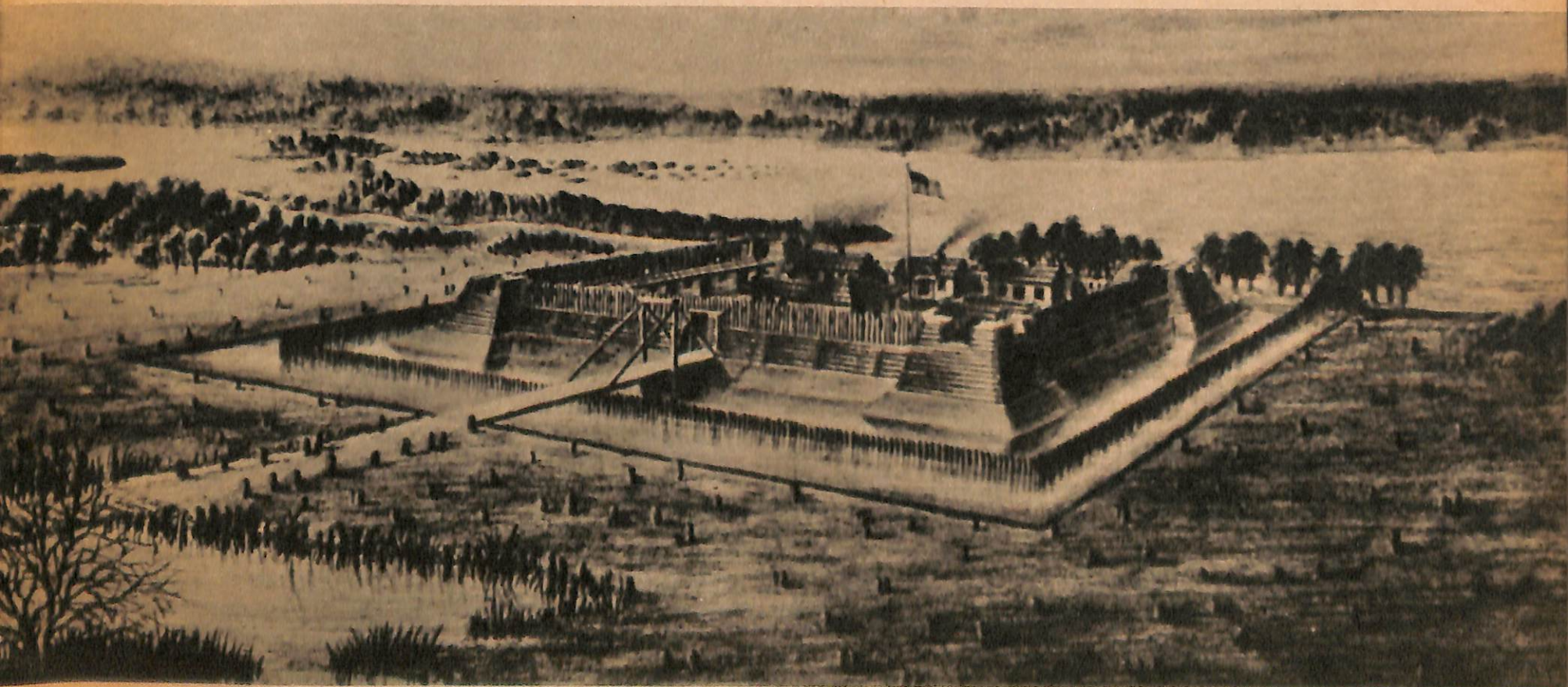
1,000 children enrolled; discussions were being held concerning construction of a new Jefferson County courthouse to replace the present log structure; Griffin & McAchran Stage Lines was advertising that 14-hour stage passage from Louisville to Lexington now was available; river traffic, which had been given unimpeded passage on the Ohio River with the opening of the Portland Canal around the falls seven years before, had reached an all-time high; the city's iron works, distilleries, tobacco and hemp factories were enjoying unprecedented business.

It was a sprawling, brawling, bustling city, that Louisville of February, 1838, the link between the Eastern seaboard and the suddenly awakening Middle West and South.

All in all, Louisville was much too excited about business and profits and the threat to both posed by that new-fangled railroad train to pay even passing attention to a significant event that took place on February 15.

But on that day the city made one of its longest steps forward when the Louisville Gas and Water Company, the first such firm in the west and fourth in the entire United States, was formally incorporated.

For from that singularly unimpressive beginning in time would emerge the Louisville Gas and Electric Company, a utility concern whose only boast to consumers, large and



THE MOVE TO THE MAINLAND Louisville grew up around Fort Nelson, the first settlement on the Kentucky shore.